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AUTHOR Friday, Robert A.
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ABSTRACT

An advanced public speaking class at the Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, was specifically designed not only to improve the overall quality of a speech communication program but also to increase the number of majors that an excellent program would attract. Only students who have demonstrated superior speaking skills in basic public speaking classes are admitted to the advanced class. Course requirements include becoming members of a problem solving task force, interviewing three experts on a subject selected by their task force, reading all sources suggested by each expert, reporting and critiquing findings before task force members, and participating in the design of two 40 minute live productions of problem solving presentations before an audience of high school students. Students must be familiar with problem solving theory and should realize that having an audience aids in evaluating the success of their productions. (DF)

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Advanced Public Speaking:

A Successful Problem Solving Program That Works for Everyone

Robert A. Friday

Speech Communication

Duquesne University

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Robert A. Friday, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor of Speech at Duquesne University.

ADVANCED PUBLIC SPEAKING

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Abstract

This report describes some of the instruction, training and speaking assignments which were central to the success of a new program in advanced public speaking at Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA. This article describes one of the presentations on nuclear weapons, outlines the organization and deployment of the student "task forces" and presents a detailed outline of questions/statements which guide in-class student lecture and criticism. The report concludes with an explanation of how Richard Weaver's (Weaver-1953) discussion of the argument from definition, Lloyd Bitzer's (Bitzer-1968) requirements for a rhetorical situation and Chaim Perleman's (Perleman-1969) concept of convincing vs. persuading and the conditioning of the audience are integrated into the design of our students' final presentation before at least one hundred high school students.

The large number of competent presenters who complete the basic public speaking course are a resource begging to be utilized for a) the edification and improvement of the community; b) the expansion and improvement of our speech and communication programs and thus, their educational resource and; c) increasing the numbers of majors that comes from the public exposure of a program of excellence. This is a report on a successful advanced public speaking program which meets the above ends. The following will introduce the reader to a typical public presentation by our students, the operational procedures of the advanced public speaking seminar, an outline of lecture topics which our students present to each other and a discussion of how theory is presented and applied in the design and production of our student's presentations.

The Event

Nearly two hundred whispering, giggling seniors were stunned to silence as an ear piercing whine shattered the darkness of Sacred Heart High School Auditorium in Pittsburgh. "This is not a Test. This is an actual emergency. The City of Los Angeles has been the site of a nuclear attack."

Local television station WNUC interrupted its regular program to bring its viewers a live report from the devastating scene in Los Angeles. The reporter on the scene confirmed that a 20 megaton nuclear bomb had first vaporized or otherwise killed 88 percent of the city's population. The reporter appeared on stage beside a movie screen on which a segment of the documentary "Hiroshima

and Nagasaki" simulated "live footage" of the LA disaster.

What followed was a series of live interviews with Carl Sagan explaining his theory of "nuclear winter," a local medical expert describing the hazards of radiation poisoning and a defense expert discussing the possibility of a similar catastrophe taking place in Pittsburgh. A map of Pittsburgh with concentric circles was projected on a large screen to illustrate the extent of predicted destruction for various areas around the city. Clearly, few from the audience would survive past the first ten minutes! The interviews and demonstrations were concluded within thirty minutes.

With a warning of yet another missile launching, the return of the ear-piercing screech and a blinding strob flash, WNUC disappeared from the stage.

Seconds later, Carl Sagan turned into Phil Donahue working the audience and a panel of experts. The audience was ready: "What can we do?" The panel members responded with handouts describing homeroom activities which could increase the high schoolers awareness of the issue and involve them in the political process.

This rhetorical event was the result of extensive instruction and training in a seminar in advanced public speaking. To date we have produced similar presentations on hunger in the world, hunger in Pittsburgh, child abuse, drunk driving and career selection before an estimated combined audience of over twenty-five hundred high school juniors and seniors. The requests for our forty minute

presentations are so exceeding our live production capacity that we are now combining our efforts with an advanced video production class to create educational videos for local high schools.

The purpose of this article is to relate the theoretical context and training exercises that aided in our success in the hope that the rhetoric of problem solving can be further utilized to instruct our students and improve our society through a unique educational experience.

THE PROGRAM

The Basics

Our advanced public speaking program is based on the rhetoric of problem solving espoused by Otis M. Walter (Walter and Scott, 1984 Walter, 1976). He believes, as do I, that the highest use of the art of rhetoric is to develop our minds to ask the right question, engage in critical thinking and to lead (persuade) our audiences toward a solution to the problems of war, poverty, caste tyranny and disease.

Throughout the seminar in advanced public speaking, the students are guided through an extensive research process to assure the development of their expertise on their selected topic.

Each student must:

1. become a member of a problem solving task force composed of between three and five students

2. interview at least three experts on the subject selected by their task force
3. read or review all sources suggested by each expert
4. report on and critique their findings before members of their task force
5. participate in the design of two live productions of a 40 minute problem solving presentation before a large audience of high school students (usually juniors or seniors)

Only well read students who have polished their skills in the art of presentation and performance are permitted to enter the class.

General Procedure

1. The class at large develops a list of problems which effect the welfare of their community.
2. Between three and five students create a task force by assigning themselves to a particular topic and defining the problem .
3. Before leaving any class session each group must decide who is going where to find out what.
4. Task force members must report findings to each other every week.

Student Lectures

Each student in the seminar is responsible for the presentation of one 30-40 minute lecture. The students design their lecture

as a response to one of the groups of questions/statements below. These groups of question/statements help the student identify central ideas in their required text: Speaking Intelligently (Walter 76).

The Rhetoric of Problem Solving

a. What is rhetoric and how can it function as a vehicle for solving problems in a democratic society?

b. What is the value of questioning and what questions can we glean from the works of Protagoras, Plato, Socrates and Aristotle to help us understand contemporary problems?

c. Explain how we can view civilization as problem solving on a large scale and demonstrate how the problems selected by this class can cause the growth or decline of your civilization.

Recognizing Problems

a. Briefly demonstrate the role of war, poverty, caste tyranny and disease in the decline of previous civilizations and explain how one of these problems is weakening your civilization.

b. Explain six possible problem structures and demonstrate how these structures can illuminate new aspects of the problems selected by the class.

c. Locate three sources for the problems selected by the class. One source should be from natural science, one from social science and one from the humanities or arts.

Problem Presentation

a. Explain strategy and tactics and how they relate to the design of a presentation.

b. Demonstrate the best way to use statistics and visual aids in a presentation before a large audience.

c. Explain the uses of testimony and authority and give example of credible testimony which has helped you better understand the problem that you have selected.

The Causes of Problems

a. Discuss the cannons of agreement, difference and correlation and demonstrate how they can be applied to explain the causes of problems selected by this class.

b. Demonstrate how Aristotle's claim of causes can help the speaker develop new insight into the problems selected by the class.

c. Define "functionally related causes" and "the method of consequence" and demonstrate how each relates to the problem that you have selected for presentation.

Solutions and Problems

a. Explain Eric Sevareid's comment that "the cause of our problems is our solutions," by demonstrating how different cultures offer different solutions to the same problem.

b. How have the categories of false solution and symptomatic solutions been applied in the past to problems selected

by the class?

c. How can analogy be used to illustrate the elimination of causes and the prevention of symptoms? The analogies should be appropriate for a high school audience.

Problems and Values

a. Identify the values in our culture that support the existance of your selected problem and demonstrate how these values are in conflict with the survival and growth of your society.

b. Explain the components of a good definition, then define a value that would lead your audience to the solution of your selected problem. Avoid dictionary definitions.

c. Demonstrate how a high school audience could be persuaded to adopt a particular theory of ethics, change their daily actions and become a part of the solution of your selected problem.

Motivation and Ethos

a. Define ethos and demonstrate how the ethos of a person can have a positive or negative effect on the welfare of a people. Avoid dictionary definitions.

b. Construct and present three tactics for enhancing your ethos in the eyes of your selected audience.

c. Identify the unfulfilled needs of your selected audience and demonstrate how you can increase your ethos by attending to their needs.

Persuasion, Problems and Group Influence

a. What influence does the high school culture have on the individuals in your selected audience and how can you utilize this influence to motivate your audience to help solve your selected problem?

b. Identify the characteristics of the social group that is responsible for the persistance of your selected problem and demonstrate how you can weaken their influence on others and how their group identity can be utilized to redirect their actions or how their group can be divided from within.

c. Identify the needs of your selected audience and illustrate how the solution to your problem is compatable with their needs and how the persistance of the problem is counter to their needs.

Criticism for Presentation Polish

After the first in-class rehearsal the student speakers are required to critique each others production as a step in the process of adjusting and improving the presentation. Each student must address the following questions in the critique:

Critique Questions

1. Did the presentation offer a clear definition of the problem? Add to the definition.

2. Did the speakers utilize the most persuasive arguments for the

audience and situation? Suggest another argument.

3. Did the presentation clearly explain the causes and the audiences relationship to these causes? State a cause relationship not discussed in the presentation.
4. Was detailed information presented with creative visual aids and useful handouts? Suggest another creative visual or a new design for a handout.
5. Did the speakers attempt to persuade the members of the audience to take a specific action as their role in the solution of the problem? Was the action requested a realistic expectation for that audience? Do you think members of an audience of high school students will be persuaded to act? Can you suggest a more workable solution?

Theory and Practice

The distance from theory to practice rarely seems so great as when the first mention of the powerful argument from definition (Weaver-1953) inspires students to quote selections from Webster's dictionary. Problem solvers must learn to recognize the various elements of a problem and then to utilize the nature of the elements to construct a solution. Lincoln's second annual message to Congress is a good illustration of this problem solving method for advanced students.

Lincoln's definition of the nation (Weaver-1953) as consisting of "its territory, its people and its laws," divided the problem of slavery into elements with very distinct natures. Lincoln was

quick to distinguish the enduring part (territory) from that which is most easily changed (laws). The people change as generations pass away observed Lincoln. His solution to the problem of slavery was to persuade his audience to change the legal arrangement of slavery thus, instituting a solution that, he acknowledged, would take forty years to be accepted by the majority of the people.

Defining Solutions

The problem solver in advanced public speaking should create as complete a definition of their selected problem as possible. To that end each class engages in a brain storming session to construct a list of all the elements of the selected problems. The extensive list of elements is divided into those which we believe to be critical to the solution and those which can be changed quickly. Elements of the problem which fall into both categories serve as a basis for developing behavioral objectives for the persuasive presentation.

Our presentation on drunk driving this year was based on the belief (additionally supported by surveys) that high school juniors and seniors would respond most positively to arguments involving:

a. disappointing one's parents

b. guilt from complicity in the death of a friend

c. being labeled a criminal, i.e., loss of future possibilities

The role plays in the presentation were replete with the above themes. At one high school the task force engaged the cooperation of the most popular student by having him be the victim in the car

crash simulation. The task force determined that the most realistic and effective objective was to persuade the students to sign a contract for life with their parents. The contracts, which were handed out at the conclusion required parents and children to supply rides to each other without question in the event that either became intoxicated away from home.

Audience

The decision to use assemblies of high school juniors and seniors for our audiences has been beneficial to our program. Our speakers recent high school experience enables them to make some fairly sound observations regarding the controlling exigencies of the rhetorical situation. Specifically, our students examine the needs or problems of the high schoolers in all areas of their lives. Then, our speakers determine the ultimate or perfect solution to meet the need or resolve the problem for the members of the audience. Finally, our speakers determine what first steps the audience can take toward a solution or resolution. The high schoolers are viewed as possible mediators of change. And an action within the capability of that audience becomes the goal of the persuasive presentors. (Bitzer,1968) This initial goal setting helps our speakers understand the difference between convincing and persuading which is essential in problem solving. (Perleman,1969)

From our point of view as teachers and trainers of successful problem solvers, the young audience offers a considerable challenge to the equally young rhetors. Few high school students are good

listeners. Put over one hundred of them in an assembly before a less than prepared speaker and you have a perfect combination for pandemonium. The challenge of persuading such an audience has inspired our students to produce presentations far beyond the quality of in-class assignments. The traditional stand-up speech of the introductory class appears hopelessly inadequate after an examination of the sociology and conditioning of the high school audience. (Perleman,1969). When our speakers construct a conditioning profile of their audience they examine the high schoolers favorite TV shows, videos and characters. The problem solvers note the frequency of scene change, use of light, rhythm, tone and body movement in productions popular among their audience. As they construct their presentation the familiar sensory stimulation devices are adapted to the fluctuation between role play and stand-up speech, background music, blocking and gesture, multiple uses of lighting, etc. While all the productions from this program have presented ample amounts of information and hopefully persuasive material, those which fully and creatively incorporated the sensory stimulation compatible with the prior conditioning of the audience have exceeded all expectations during the question and answer period. Twice this year our audiences compelled school officials to extend the assembly period so that they could continue the discussion.

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